PLAYING WITH YOUR BABY

Learning and Growing in the First Year

Child Development Centre

Why is it Important to Play with your baby?

Play is more than fun—it's how your baby learns about the world and develops essential skills. Play supports cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth while also strengthening your bond and building secure attachment. You are your baby's first and most important teacher!

Through play, babies develop:

- **Gross motor skills** (big movements like rolling, crawling, walking)
- **Fine motor skills** (smaller movements like grasping, reaching, and holding)
- **Social-emotional skills** (trust, bonding, and interaction)
- **Early communication and language skills**

Gross Motor Skills: Tummy Time!

Tummy time is one of the most important early play activities. It helps babies build the strength they need for rolling, crawling, sitting, and eventually walking.

Benefits of Tummy Time:

- Strengthens head, neck, back, and shoulder muscles
- Builds the foundation for motor milestones (pushing up, rolling, crawling)
- Provides sensory feedback to help babies learn body awareness
- Helps prevent flat spots on the head (plagiocephaly) and tight neck muscles (torticollis)

When to start:

- From day one! Begin with short periods of **chest-to-chest** tummy time on you.
- Work toward a total of **about 1 hour per day by 3 months of age** (in small, supervised sessions).

Gross Motor Skills: Tummy Time!

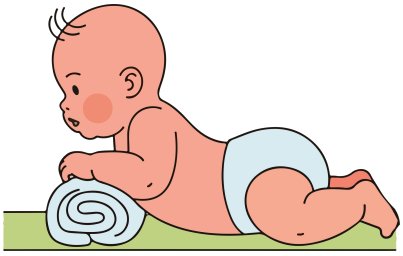
Ways to make Tummy Time fun:

- Get down on the floor face-to-face with your baby
- Place colorful toys or a baby-safe mirror in front of them
- Use a small rolled towel under their chest for extra support
- Carry your baby in tummy-down positions (e.g., football hold)

Things to Look for and encourage:

- Head in line with body, chin tucked, body straight
- Arms forward, elbows under shoulders
- Hips flat, legs straight or slightly apart

⚠️ **Safety reminder: Always supervise tummy time and never place your baby on their tummy to sleep.**



A rolled towel under the chest can add extra support for baby during Tummy Time.

Early Language Skills

Babies are wired to communicate long before they can talk. Play gives them a chance to practice sounds, gestures, and early turn-taking, while strengthening your relationship.

General strategies to support language development:

- **Be animated:** Use facial expressions, big smiles, and varied tone to keep baby engaged.
- **Be face-to-face**: During feeding, diaper changes, and play, let your baby see your face. Get down on their level when possible!
- **Talk during daily routines:** Narrate what you are doing and name objects and people.
- **Imitate baby's sounds/actions**: If your baby coos, coo back! Add another sound or word to build interaction.
- **Interpret gestures and sounds:** Act as if their sounds and gestures have meaning and respond.
  - For example, if your baby says "Da" you might respond with "Daddy, yes there's daddy!"
  - If your child shakes their cup, you may respond: "milk… yes, your milk is all gone."
- **Pause and wait:** Give your baby time to "answer" before you continue talking.
- **Create opportunities for communication:** Offer choices, hold up two toys, and wait to see how your baby responds.

Social-Emotional Development

Play doesn't need to be fancy—simple, everyday interactions are the most powerful.

Examples of playful activities:

- Songs and rhymes: Sing slowly and clearly; use repetition. Babies love rhythm and melody.
- Books: Start with short, simple books with big pictures. Point and name objects.
- People games: Games where you are the toy build connection and attention.
  - Peek-a-boo
  - Songs with actions (Itsy Bitsy Spider, Wheels on the Bus)
  - Horsey Ride: Place baby on your knee facing you, gently bounce, and narrate ("bounce, bounce, bounce").

Other fun ideas:

- Gentle movement games (rocking, swaying, dancing with your baby in arms)
- Fine motor and sensory play (safe household items to feel, smell, look at—different textures, fabrics, rattles)
- Mirror play (babies love looking at faces—theirs and yours!)

💡 **Tip: Pair these activities with tummy time for extra benefits!**

Final Thoughts for Families

- Play doesn't require special toys—your voice, face, and attention are the best tools.
- Build play into your daily routine! Make diaper changes, walks and cuddles into play opportunities.
- Every baby develops at their own pace. Celebrate small milestones and enjoy the process.

Sign up for the Follow Along Program at the Child Development Centre

The Follow Along program is for children from birth to three or four years old and their parents or caregivers.

- Learn about your child's development and milestones and what to expect next as your child grows and develops.
- Be provided with fun ideas for activities to try at home.
- Have a chance to ask questions about how your child is moving, talking, sleeping, behaving, or anything else related to their development.

Visits are scheduled one or two times a year, depending on the age of your child. Visits are fun and focused on play.

The Follow Along program is FREE and is available in Whitehorse and all Yukon communities. Visits take place at our centre, your home, or another location if requested.

You can enroll your child anytime by filling out a referral form at **www.cdcyukon.ca/referral** or calling **867-456-8182.**

Other services at the Child Development Centre

In addition to the Follow Along Program, we also offer a range of services to support children and families. If at any time during your parenting/caregiving journey, you have questions about your child's development - contact us! We support children and families from newborn to kindergarten entry throughout the Yukon. Our services are free!

We help answer questions and provide support in areas such as: movement, behaviour, sleeping, eating, toileting, sensitivities (to sound or touch) and speech/communication. Our therapists are experts in the early years, and include physiotherapists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, developmental therapists and psychologists.

Some reasons to contact us

If you are curious about your child's development, or if your child:

- is not making or responding to sounds during the first year
- has fewer than 20 words at 18 months of age
- has a hard time playing with other children
- gets upset with minor changes to their routine
- has difficulty paying attention or understanding directions
- is not crawling by 12 months
- is very sensitive to touch, sounds, movement or smells

Or if you just have questions or things you aren't sure about!

How to sign-up

Choose the way that works best for you.

- Fill out a form at www.cdcyukon.ca/referral
- Call our office: 867-456-8182
- Email: info@cdcyukon.ca

References and Resources

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